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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the amelioration of college teaching by the use of peer review within a supportive mentor relationship. In such a relationship, the mentor and the more junior teacher work as peers, and this removes the punitive element from the evaluation process and adds an element of support. The peer/mentor evaluator can be simply a colleague who is asked to observe and provide feedback, or could be part of a project to improve teaching excellence. The elements of a peer/mentor teaching evaluation include: (1) positive feedback first; (2) comprehensive evaluation; (3) recognition of areas where the evaluating peer's expertise is lacking; (4) emphasis on context; (5) recognition of other responsibilities that impact on teaching; (6) emphasis on growth and a "better way" to do things; (7) emphasis on mutual support; (8) focus on the enhancement of tactics, techniques, and strategies to improve learning; and (9) separation of the personality of the instructor from the instructional process. Areas of concern include discrepancies between peer evaluation and students' evaluation of the professor's instruction, the consequences if improved teaching does not result from the peer review process, and consideration of research and service as other components of college faculty positions. (Contains 18 references.) (JDD)

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# Peer Review of Teaching

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Abstract

This paper discusses the pros and cons of peer review of teaching and emphasizes the mentoring aspect of peer review. It further discusses the rather complex issues involved relative to faculty evaluation.

Teaching is a major part of the professorial task. It is the main focus since, service and research are not observed by as many people, nor do they often affect as many individuals.

The delivery of direct instruction in the college classroom is seen by many as the main part of their job. Many individuals are able to procure tenure by writing grants and doing research, but almost no individual is able to procure tenure without having an adequate record of college teaching.

" Teaching is an art, and, as in the case of all arts, even its most gifted practitioners can improve their skills through review of fundamentals " ( Cahn, 1982, p. 36 )

Even though most college professors have the earned doctorate, they can still improve their teaching. The issue is how this can best be accomplished.

The term " college teaching " deserves discussion. College teaching can range from teaching large sections of an Introductory course to doctoral seminars. Upper division lab courses as well as graduate level courses must be included in this description.

Kendall (1987) has advocated a "self evaluation system " and has devised a 4 page teaching self evaluation form . In this system, instructors can self-evaluate, which

is at least, a step in the right direction.

Student evaluations of teaching effectiveness are somewhat unreliable and often invalid. Many teachers " spoon feed " their students to get good evaluations or simply assign multiple choice tests to avoid grading term papers, projects, portfolios or reports. Student evaluations have been extensively critiziced and reviewed (see Neely and Shaughnessy, 1988) In addition, there is the problem of " outliers " that haunt professors. Outliers are individuals who circle either all positive numbers on the Likert Scale format or all negative numbers on the evaluation sheet. These outliers tend to skew means and make meaningful interpretation difficult.

Student comments are often even more difficult to use as evaluative measures. One student who is taking 18 hours may feel Professor Eyestrain assigns too much work. Another student with a load of 12 hours may feel that the Professor could have assigned more reading and pushed the class at a faster rate.

Students comments are often misinterpreted or misconstrued. Students often have to be repeatedly told that the material that they are about to receive is a THEORY, and not the ultimate truth. Too many students attribute the theory to the Professor, and not to the

theorist who formulated the idea. If students dislike Darwin or Freud, they may evaluate Professor Eyestrain negatively.

Unfortunately, evaluations can be very detrimental to morale. While some administrators do not believe in the word morale, it does exist, and can deleteriously affect one's ability to function. If a professor attempts to improve his/her teaching, then their service or research may suffer. On the other hand, good, quality research does take time away from classes. Improving one's writing and research may hinder progress in ameliorating one's pedagogy.

Evaluations must be taken in context. Some courses are simply more labor intensive than others and require more preparation than others. Some examinations can be multiple choice. Other exams must be of the essay variety. Reading one hundred essay exams can take it's emotional toll each semester ( and does not reflect the amount of effort invested in each class in terms of preparation ). In the field of science, labs are a major concern.

Overall and Marsh (1980) have studied longitudinal student evaluations of instructors. They found that students, if repeatedly asked to assess instructors and their teaching were very consistent. It may be important to evaluate not just at the beginning of instruction, but also

at the middle and at the end of instruction to get a true picture of the instructor's teaching effectiveness. This, however, take time, effort and energy. Leventhal, Abrami and Perry (1976) found that students who select instructors on the basis of teacher " reputation " tend to rate those teachers more favorably. Abrami and Mizener (1980) discerned that congruence of attitude between student and instructor is also a variable of importance. Elmore and Pohlmann (1978) discerned that three main areas of concern were related to positive student evaluation of teaching. These areas include a) small class size b) instructors who perceive themselves as " warm " and c) students expected high grades. Their Istructional Improvement Questionnaire (IIQ, Elmore and Pohlmann,1975) was utilized in this research.

Mentoring for Enhancing Teaching Effectiveness

Mentoring is one methodology for assisting younger collegues in a variety of settings. Business, industry, and medicine all employ an apprentice type of situation whereby an older, wiser, more experienced, knowledgeable individual is paired with a younger, novice with less experience. Cordova, Shaughnessy and Neely (1990) have discussed the use of mentoring with women and minorities in higher education. One large part of the mentoring process is being

supportive and emotionally available for the protege. These groups present special challenges and need additional emotional support and encouragement, especially if universities are serious about retaining good faculty. The issues of mentoring and multiculturalism have been reviewed by Cordova and Shaughnessy (1993a). The complexities and "nuts and bolts" have been succinctly addressed by Shaughnessy and Cordova (1993b). Daloz (1986), Zey (1984) and Torrance (1984) are excellent sources for mentors, proteges, and those interested in mentoring.

Within the context of a mentor relationship, peer evaluation of teachers can be effective and helpful. Certainly the mentor may have a few more years experience, or may know the student population better than the younger colleague, but the point is that the Associate and the Assistant Professor are both peers, and this removes the punitive element from the evaluation process and adds an element of support.

Padilla (1994) has discussed mentoring as a major focus for ethnic minorities. However, " mentoring poses a major problem for ethnic scholars because of our small numbers " (p.25). While there are certainly efforts to recruit minorities, there is a double edged sword facing them in the universities. While they may have been

recruited highly, there may be significantly fewer efforts to retain these individuals and to assist them toward tenure and/or promotion. Mentoring is one tool that can be used to assist them to at least enhance their teaching. Mentoring for research development is a separate issue.

The peer/mentor evaluator can be simply a colleague who is asked to observe and provide feedback, or the peer/mentor evaluator could be part of a project/grant to improve teaching excellence.

The elements of a peer/mentor teaching evaluation are as follows :

1) An emphasis on positive feedback first- Tell the peer what they are doing well. If they are trying to teach 101 students in a small room, they should be told that under the existing circumstances, they are doing well.

2) An emphasis on a comprehensive evaluation- regarding the pacing, the speech, the overheads (if used) the dress and grooming of the collegue, the use of hand motions or mannerisms, the eye contact, the use of examples, the use of questions, the summary at the end and the assigning of homework all bear mentioning.

3) An emphasis perhaps on the lack of expertise of the peer who is doing the evaluating. We must all acknowledge our weaknesses in terms of our skills in clinical supervision

and observation. One infuriating aspect of administrative review is the fact that the evaluators may never have been trained in evaluation and evaluative techniques. They enter the class and then proceed to fill out some form which may be anachronistic or inappropriate and base their evaluation on a very brief period of time.

On the other hand, if the evaluator is competent and trained, they should be able to provide important corrective feedback and assistance in a cordial, congenial manner. They should allow for explanations from the peer as to why they did, what they did, when they did it.

4) An emphasis on context. If Professor Hardworker is currently on 17 committees and is teaching 5 courses due to an overload situation, his or her teaching should be specifically evaluated within this context. If Professor Lazybones is teaching four courses, but they are all Introduction to Sociology, this should also be evaluated in the equation. If Dr. Highbrow is teaching all graduate level courses, this too, should be a major factor in the evaluation.

Another factor that should be taken in context is the fact that some professors teach courses via instructional television. Professor Gutenuf who teaches two " ITV " courses may be much different on the screen than in

real life. Also, Professor Trublu, who drives two hours to teach at a " satellite " campus may arrive exhausted and not do a good job teaching. Compensations and adjustments may have to be made for these two individuals.

5) An emphasis on other responsibilities. If one faculty member is advising 106 students, and another is advising 25, an observation during " advising week " is not beneficial, nor judicious.

6) An emphasis on growth and a " better way " to do things. Although modifications may be minor, these changes may indeed improve the peer's teaching. Furthermore, many small improvements may " add up " to make a better instructor.

7) An emphasis on mutual support. Let's face it- teaching is not an easy thing and we all need support. Peer review can provide that support and mutual assistance.

8) A focus on the enhancement of tactics, techniques and strategies to improve learning, both in the classroom as well as outside the classroom. This may include a review of syllabi, course assignments, and outside projects.

9) Can we separate the personality of the instructor, from the instruction ? Some instructors get good evaluations simply because they are warm, friendly and behave in an expected manner. Professor Trihard may deliver excellent information, but lack the charisma that some other

individual possesses.

One issue of concern is the discrepancy between the peer evaluation and the student's evaluation. While Professor Prolifik may do a good job explaining existentialism to a colleague, the students may not share exactly the same enthusiastic warmth a colleague has for the topic. Consequently, there may be a discrepancy between a peer evaluation of a fellow instructors pedagogy, and the evaluation the students have of the instructor or his or her instruction.

Students, for whatever reason, may not evaluate a good teacher highly. Students are subject to many outside variables (Jackson & Shaughnessy, 1987) which preoccupy their time, and which interfere with the process of education. Some students work part time, have families, car difficulties, fiscal problems and emotional concerns outside of the university setting. For some students, the teachers who assign the least work, and give the easiest tests and highest grades are often most highly evaluated.

A secondary issue is to what should transpire if improved teaching is not forthcoming. Some possible assignments may rectify the situation. A poor instructor can simply watch the person he/she feels is a good instructor and model their behavior after the superlative

instructor. Most colleges have " methods and materials " classes which may review pedagogy. There are video tapes available to review the basic components of college teaching (Shaughnessy, 1994)

Lastly, there must be mention of the fact that research and service are the other two components of evaluation. While we want to improve ALL instruction, we must not neglect committees and publishing and presenting. Colleagues must be warned not to neglect the service and research component of the job. All too often, individuals endeavor to improve their teaching, and their research suffers. Given the length of time for peer review in refereed journals, it is not a good idea to devote too much time to class preparation and outside review sessions.

In a sense, one is walking a very thin tightrope between teaching, service and research. Or, we are " burning the candle at all three ends ". We do not want to neglect our families or mental health while improving our teaching.

A true peer review of one's teaching can be accomplished, given the expertise of the reviewer, the diplomacy and skills of the reviewer, and the sincere desire of the individual observed to improve. This requires a high degree of maturity, and an ability to accept constructive

criticism. A true peer review is positive if it is conducted in either a formal or informal manner. This should be determined prior to the observation. A colleague can simply observe or make comments, or can use a structured format. Ross and Regan (1993) have indicated that this type of shared professional experience can have very positive effects on professional development. Harvey and Green ( 1993) indicate the need for higher education to pursue quality in terms of process, outcomes, and value for money. There is still a need to specify " quality " teaching in a clearly defined context. A professor may be able to deliver quality instruction to ten students in a graduate level class. He or she may be less able to deliver instruction to 30 undergraduates, many of whom work part time or are parents caring for their children.

Summary and Conclusions

This paper has attempted to discuss the amelioration of teaching within a supportive mentor relationship. It has discussed some of the major issues of concern relative to the issue of " teacher evaluation ". There are pros, cons and concerns relative to improving teaching, and peer evaluation. The concerns must be addressed in depth and understood by all concerned prior to implementing a formal program.



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